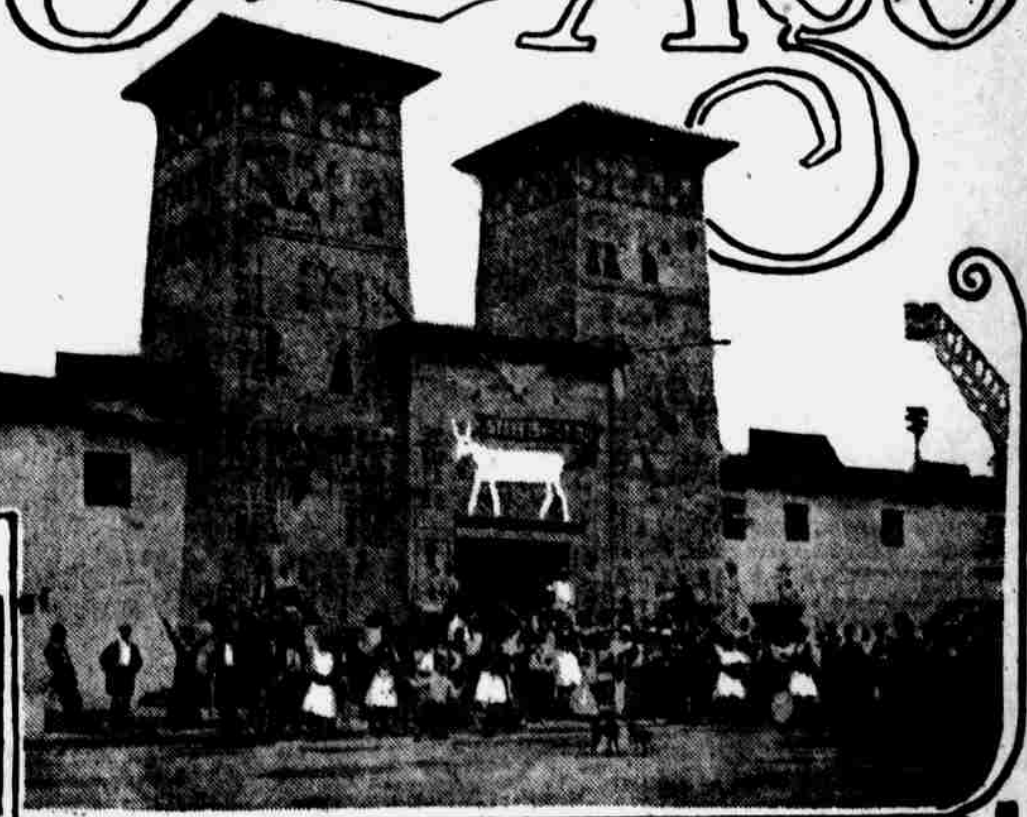


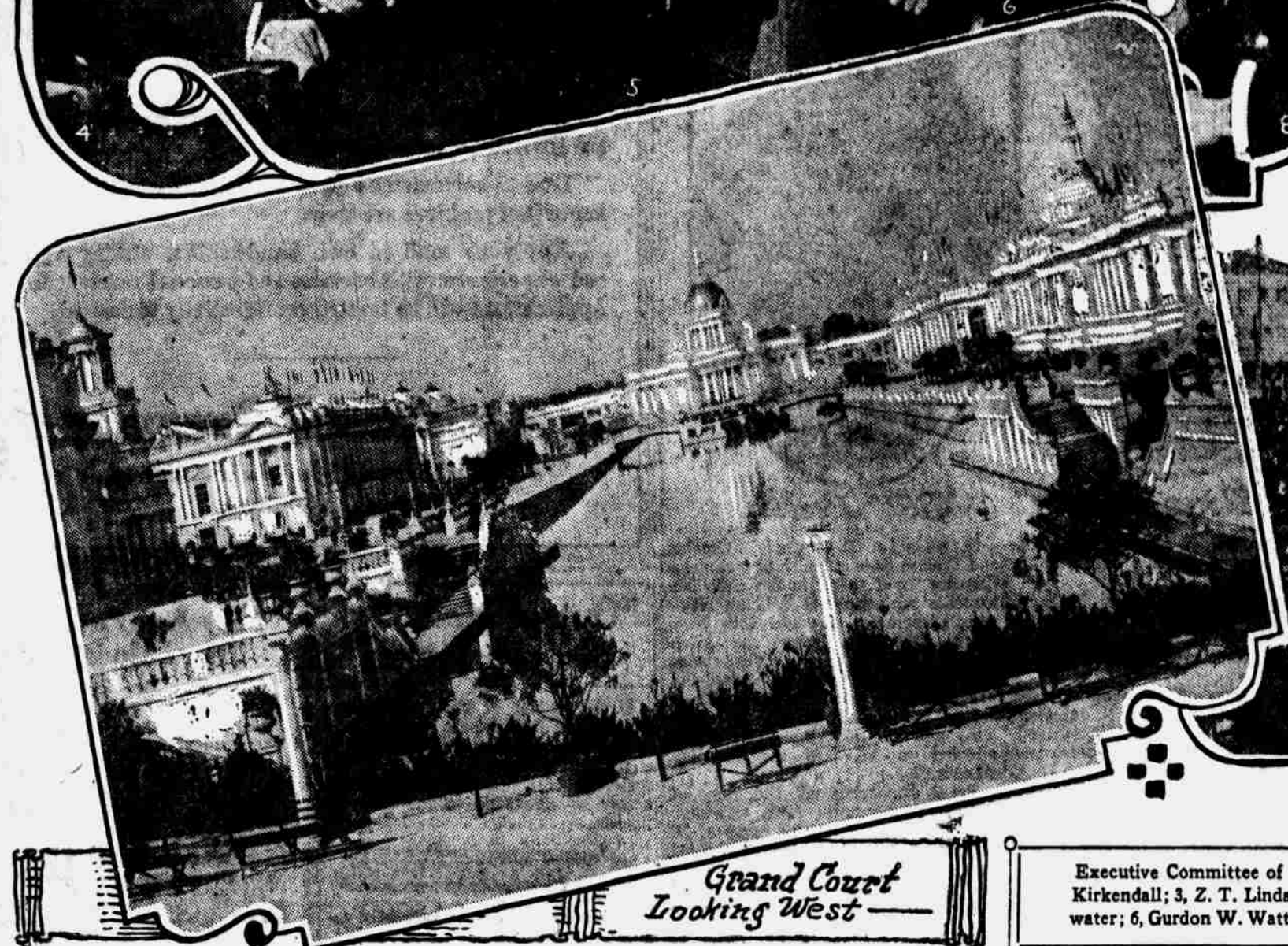
Trans-Mississippi Exposition 20 Yrs. Ago



Executive Committee



Entrance to the Streets of Cairo



Grand Court Looking West



Independence Day Crowd

OMAHA'S GATES STOOD AJAR TO VAST WORLD TWO DECADES PASSED

Great Exposition Brought City's Fame Into International Prominence When American Notables and Foreigners of Caste Came Here to View Beauties of Glorious West on Magnificent Display

By A. R. GROH.

July 1, 1918—just twenty years ago yesterday—was a great day for Omaha. On that day the Transmississippi and International exposition opened its gates to the world.

This undertaking, stupendous for those days and for the precarious financial times, had been brought to a successful completion, and, true to the sterling qualities of the executive committee, which carried the burdens of the enterprise, the gates of the completed exposition were thrown open to the public on the day and hour set.

The exposition occupied all that space which lies between Twenty-fourth street, Sherman avenue, Pinkney and Pratt streets; all the high ground east of Sherman avenue from Binney street to Sprague street; all the space between Sprague street and the Missouri Pacific railroad tracks from Twenty-fourth street to Sherman avenue, and the space between Sprague and Spaulding streets between Twentieth street and Sherman avenue.

VACANT SPACE 20 YEARS AGO

Twenty years ago this was all vacant and it is an astonishing revelation of Omaha's growth to realize that now it is all occupied by homes, and the residence area, well built up, extends miles to the north.

Not only was Omaha comparatively small and the times financially "hard," but the United States was in the midst of war with Spain when the exposition was opened. It was a war that was to be drawn to a victorious close before the exposition was over.

The weather had been stormy and wet for weeks before the opening day. But opening day dawned bright and clear, and it proved to be ideal in every way for the great ceremonies which marked it in Omaha.

The parade began to move at 10 o'clock in the morning, reaching the grounds at 11 o'clock. There, at the east end of the main court, the opening ceremonies were held. These included addresses by President Gurdon W. Wattles, John L. Webster of Omaha, John N. Baldwin of Council Bluffs and Silas A. Holcomb of Nebraska. Edward Rosewater, who had put forth such prodigious efforts in promoting the exposition, was ill as the result of overwork and was unable to be present.

MARINE BAND WAS HERE

Music was furnished by the United States Marine band.

At 12:30 noon came the final act which formally opened the Transmississippi and International exposition. This was the pressing of a key by President McKinley in the White House at Washington. When the president pressed the key the machinery of the exposition was set in motion.

At 4 o'clock an official public reception was held in the United States government building and at 8 o'clock a concert was given in the Auditorium by the Theodore Thomas orchestra, assisted by the exposition chorus. At 9 o'clock there was a grand fireworks exhibition.

The total admissions for the opening day were 27,998.

Executive Committee of the Exposition—1, A. L. Reed; 2, F. P. Kirkendall; 3, Z. T. Lindsey; 4, W. N. Babcock; 5, Edward Rosewater; 6, Gurdon W. Wattles; 7, John A. Wakefield; 8, E. E. Bruce

Closing of the Exposition

October 31, 1898, was designated "Omaha day" at the exposition. It was also closing day. The great exposition was about to go into history, its many exhibits to be distributed again to the four corners of the earth, its beautiful and graceful buildings to be torn down.

A crowd second only to that of President's day visited the grounds on the last day, running up a total for the day of 61,236 admissions.

Mayor Moore issued a proclamation, making this a legal holiday in Omaha and the public schools were closed, as were also many of the business houses.

The weather was beautiful, as it had been on opening day, five months previous. The formal closing exercises were held in the auditorium on the exposition grounds at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Inness band played and there were addresses by Manager Edward Rosewater, Manager Z. T. Lindsey, President Gurdon W. Wattles and Mayor Frank E. Moores.

Mr. Rosewater Spoke

Mr. Rosewater dwelt upon the colossal labors and the astonishing results secured by those who had pushed the exposition to success.

"Three months after Omaha had been selected as the exposition city," he said, "scarcely forty men met to start the subscription list. The first man wanted to head the list with \$100, but over \$100,000 was finally subscribed. Even when we went back to Congress for a \$300,000 appropriation we had only \$125,000 paid in. It was a great piece of gall, but we succeeded not only in getting the original appropriation, but \$400,000 additional for the Indian congress. It was not luck but hard work that brought this about. Hard, continuous labor has brought about this success. Chicago received enough money from the federal government to build ten expositions. Even then they had to postpone their's a year. We in spite of war and financial conditions, opened our exposition on time and we close it today with all the glory anyone could wish."

Tribute from Mr. Wattles

President Wattles paid a tribute to the men who had assisted him in the great undertaking.

"To this city the exposition has been like a rain in a drought," he said. "It has put new life and energy in all our business interests, in the clearings of our banks, in the business of our merchants, to the values of our real estate, to the fabrics of our factories. Our people have forgotten the evils of panic and depression in the enjoyment of the beauties so abundant on these grounds."

"To the state and to the entire west it has given a new standing among the people of the east and far-away countries which will stimulate immigration and investment in all future years."

Celebrities at Exposition

The Trans-Mississippi exposition drew to Omaha men of national and international note. Ministers and plenipotentiaries of foreign lands, governors of many states, statesmen of national fame, leaders in all lines of endeavor were the honored guests of the exposition and scarcely a day passed without some prominent person being here. Among men of international note from outside of Nebraska who visited the exposition were:

William McKinley, president of the United States.
Wu Ting Fang, Chinese minister to the United States.
Brazilian Minister Brasil.
Gonzalo de Quesada, charge d'affaires of the Cuban Junta.
Lyman J. Gage, secretary of the treasury of the United States.
Cornelius N. Bliss, secretary of the interior of the United States.
Secretary of Agriculture Wilson.
Chin Eom Ye, Korean minister to the United States.
Major General Miles.
Postmaster General Charles E. Smith.
General A. W. Greely.
General William R. Shafter.
Theodore Roosevelt.
William Howard Taft.
Chauncey M. Depew.

The Midway Plaisance

The playground of the exposition was composed of all sorts of novel attractions, and it proved to be a great success. Total receipts of the concessions were \$276,112.

"Streets of All Nations" presented types of many different nations. The "Moorish Palace," "German Village," "Old Plantation," "Philippine Village," "Chinese Village," Hagenbeck's Trained Animal show, miniature railway, "Havana and the Maine," "Merri-mac and Monitor," "Magic Maze," haunted swing, giant see-saw, scenic railway, shooting-the-chutes, wild west show and ostrich farm were some of the principal attractions.

Architecture

The Transmississippi exposition, from the purely artistic viewpoint, was a veritable gem of beauty. No finer sight can be imagined than the grand court, with the lagoon in the middle, the United States government building at one end and the principal exposition buildings on the sides.

The exposition was an artistic whole without bewildering complexity of plan.

OMAHA IN THOSE DAYS

The only automobile in Omaha was one that was on exhibition at the exposition. It was regarded as a sort of "freak."

Frank E. Moore was mayor of Omaha. Silas A. Holcomb was governor of Nebraska. William McKinley was president of the United States.

All the street cars were four-wheelers.

The old brick high school stood on the hill.

The court house also stood on a high hill.

The tallest building in Omaha was 10 stories.

High clay banks stood, where now are the City National bank building, Brandeis theater building and many other structures.

Moving pictures were unknown.

The United States was at war with Spain.

The grain exchange was not created.

Charley Turner's home stood on the high bank on the northeast corner of Sixteenth and Howard streets, and George Hoagland's big frame house on the high bank on the northwest corner.

Dundee had scarcely any houses and Benson was a country village.

Omaha was decidedly "wet."

Fifty Directors of the Exposition

The 50 directors of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition company were the 50 leading business and professional men of Omaha 20 years ago. More than half of them are now dead.

They were elected at a stockholders' meeting held December 1, 1896, and were as follows:

Chas. F. Manderson, Dudley Smith, Frank Murphy, J. W. Carpenter, J. H. Millard, T. L. Kimball, Z. T. Lindsey, Thomas Kilpatrick, F. P. Kirkendall, E. E. Bruce, C. E. Yost, H. A. Thompson, G. M. Hitchcock, C. M. Wilhelm, Herman Kuntze, Letaus Wells, John H. Husa, G. W. Holdrege, John A. Wakefield, Edward Rosewater, A. L. Roelke, R. H. Novas, John A. Johnson, John A. Creighton, E. C. Price, W. A. Paxton, Walter Jardine, J. H. Babcock, C. W. Lyman, J. H. Evans, George F. Bidwell, C. R. Montgomery, Alvin Saunders, A. H. Dickinson, A. L. Roelke, Thomas Hector, John A. Johnson, A. C. Smith, John L. Webster, Charles Metz, F. B. Ribbard, Dr. E. W. Lee, J. L. Brandeis, J. C. Wharton, C. F. Weiler, Fred M. Young.

What Omaha Did

The big problem in getting the Trans-Mississippi exposition under way was that of finance.

Omaha wasn't half as big and as rich then as it is today and the raising of the first \$500,000 was a colossal task. The financial condition of the country then wasn't what it is today.

On January 18, 1896, a citizens' meeting was called. Of the 50 who attended the following gave \$500 each: Edward Rosewater, W. J. Connell, J. H. Evans, Dan Farrell, Jr., Lee-Clark-Andersen company, W. R. Bennett company, J. E. Markel & Son; Thompson, Belden & Co.; William Krug, Oscar J. Pickering, Metz Brothers, Frank B. Hibbard, Dudley Smith, Kelly, Stiger & Co.

Others subscribed smaller amounts, making a total of \$10,650. The work went on and by October 9 it was announced that 6,124 persons had subscribed \$343,080. Then the Burlington railroad gave \$30,000, the Union Pacific \$25,000, the Missouri Pacific, \$15,000, the Rock Island, \$20,000, the Milwaukee, \$10,000, the street railway company and the gas company \$10,000 each. So the work went on under the tireless pushing of the Omaha men until the \$500,000 was safely in the treasury.

But there were many discouragements still in the future. There came times when the clouds hung so low over the great project that some of the directors actually advised abandoning it entirely. Once when the buildings were being erected a contractor of a certain building sent word to the executive committee that unless his estimate of \$12,000 was paid within 30 minutes he would abandon work and publish his reasons for doing so. Less than \$1,000 was in the treasury. President Wattles and Chairman Lindsey saved the day then by advancing their personal checks.

Financial Success

The financial success of the Trans-Mississippi exposition was the greatest ever achieved by any exposition. The stockholders who subscribed to \$500,000 of the stock in the early promotion days "kissed their money goodbyes," not expecting any back.

But when the affairs were wound up they were notified that they would receive dividends. And one day there was a long line at the Merchants' National bank where the payments were made. No ordinary dividend was this, but a payment of 90 per cent of the amount originally subscribed. President Wattles said:

"This was the only exposition in America promptly opening its gates to the public on a completed show on the day and hour originally appointed; the first to open free from mortgage or pledge of all or some of its gate receipts; the first to make money each and every month of the exposition season and the first to repay to its stockholders any considerable portion of the funds advanced by them. In these respects the Trans-Mississippi and International exposition stands without a rival."